



Hunterdon Land Trust

Protecting the places you love

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Purchase of a Little Lot Means a Whole Lot to Kingwood's Idell Preserve

KINGWOOD, TWP. -- Early one morning, Kate Buttolph sat down to a steaming cup of coffee and the local newspaper. Scanning the small type in the real estate section, the Land Acquisition Director of the Hunterdon Land Trust came across an advertisement for a two-acre lot in Kingwood that widened her eyes and had her reaching for the telephone.

Why would someone who represents an organization that's preserved more than 7,000 acres in Hunterdon County get so excited about a rather modest parcel of land?

"There's a huge significance to this property," Buttolph said. "Huge."

Well, much of the interest stems from the Land Trust already owning 55 acres of the Idell Preserve in Kingwood Township, which was purchased in 2009. This preserve is a charming wooded lot of hardwoods and cedars teeming with birds and aquatic life. But there's a problem.

Access to the preserve is somewhat limited via a strip of property owned by the Land Trust. Visitors can enter from an old logging trail that starts at the Barbertown-Idell Road – provided they don't mind getting their feet wet. "The existing entryway is extremely wet in the spring," Buttolph said. "There are quite a few vernal ponds there."

Another problem is this: Part of the trail leading to the preserve meanders off Land Trust property onto privately owned land. That's the two-acre lot that caused the stir at the Land Trust offices when it became available.

“This purchase gives us much better access to the whole property,” Buttolph said. “So now when you go down the existing trail, it means you’re not going on private property.” It also means visitors won’t be traipsing through the vernal pools and aquatic life there, she noted.

The Hunterdon Land Trust will host an amphibian event at the preserve with Dr. Randi Eckel of Toadshade Wildflower Farm on Thursday, April 3 at 6:30 p.m. Rain date is April 10.

“The first time I saw the property I thought it would be great for an amphibian event,” said Tom Thorsen, Land Steward for the Hunterdon Land Trust. “I’ve seen turkeys out there and all kinds of habitat, amphibian eggs, Eastern box turtles and more. There’s great birding, and the first time I visited I could hear spring peepers, and it was barely April. So, it’s really alive out there.”

Buttolph agrees: “You have to get out there after the first spring rain to find the frogs and salamanders that are running around all trying to procreate,” Buttolph said.

Protecting the land where those salamanders and frogs get frisky benefits everyone, noted Thorsen and Land Trust Executive Director Patricia Ruby.

“They eat a lot of insects so unless you like mosquitoes you should appreciate the amphibians that eat them. And some of them are really cute too,” Thorsen said.

“Amphibians are sensitive to changes in their environment, like pollution, so their strong presence at the Idell Preserve serves as an indicator of high environmental quality,” Ruby said. “A healthy amphibian population offers important evidence that we are preserving the most critical resources in the Lockatong Creek watershed to protect this source of high quality water.” The Lockatong Creek feeds into the D&R Canal which provides drinking water to central New Jersey.

The Land Trust’s efforts to protect such properties also serve to forward the goals of the National Park Service’s Lower Delaware Wild & Scenic Program which aims to protect the remarkable natural, historic, and recreational resources that earned this stretch of the river the Wild and Scenic designation.

The Land Trust purchased the property for \$60,000 from William Clark, and the transaction from start to finish took less than a year to complete.

“This all came about because I was reading the real estate section in the newspaper back in March 2013, so this all happened pretty fast,” Buttolph said.

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